

The Tonal School

THE TONAL SCHOOL OF AMERICA BY CLARA RUGE

WE HAVE to-day a national school of landscape painting which is rapidly advancing in importance and originality. It is not indeed the first well-defined school in this country. The Hudson River school was distinct and characteristic. But the Tonal School is the first one, I believe, which is destined to leave a mark in the history of art.

Henry W. Ranger, the leader of the movement, gave it the name "Tonal" in designating the exhibition held at the Lotos Club fifteen years ago. The word is used for a quality in painting that is too old to be called an American invention. Emerson says that an idea is to be credited to the man who most fitly expresses it. In this respect, the Tonal method, if not primarily, is at least characteristically American.

To choose a satisfactory name for an art movement, still more to expound its precise application, is a difficult matter. A new school is, as it were, a new dialect in the language of painting. To cite the region, origin and antecedents is insufficient. The vocabulary must be collected; the technique must be studied.

Tone ordinarily signifies harmony in the colour

scheme. It should not be confused, though it sometimes is, with the quality called value, which is a matter of the correct relationship between gradations of light. Yet if we apply this distinction alone to the work of the school we are wide of the mark.

The method of representing natural colours by pigment is often a touchstone to the secrets of technique. The earlier painters mixed their pigments on the palate, and brushing the combination on the canvas let it convey its message to the eye. The impressionists mixed their pigments in the eye. They put separate touches of pure contrasting colour line by line on the canvas and let the effect on the retina challenge comparison with the effects of sunlight. The tonal painters mix their tints, but mainly under the brush on the canvas direct. But this is far from being the whole story.

Again, the representation of colours implies a transcript from Nature. It has been maintained that the grass and foliage of this planet were green—bright green in the sunlight and deep green in the shade. This is on the whole a comfortable doctrine and much can be made of it. Yet, without throwing suspicion on the existence of chlorophyll, any boy on the night of the Fourth of July may with a canister of red fire raise disturbing doubts. With much more pains and labour the *plein air* school has proved the same case—that colour is an external



LANDSCAPE

BY HENRY W. RANGER



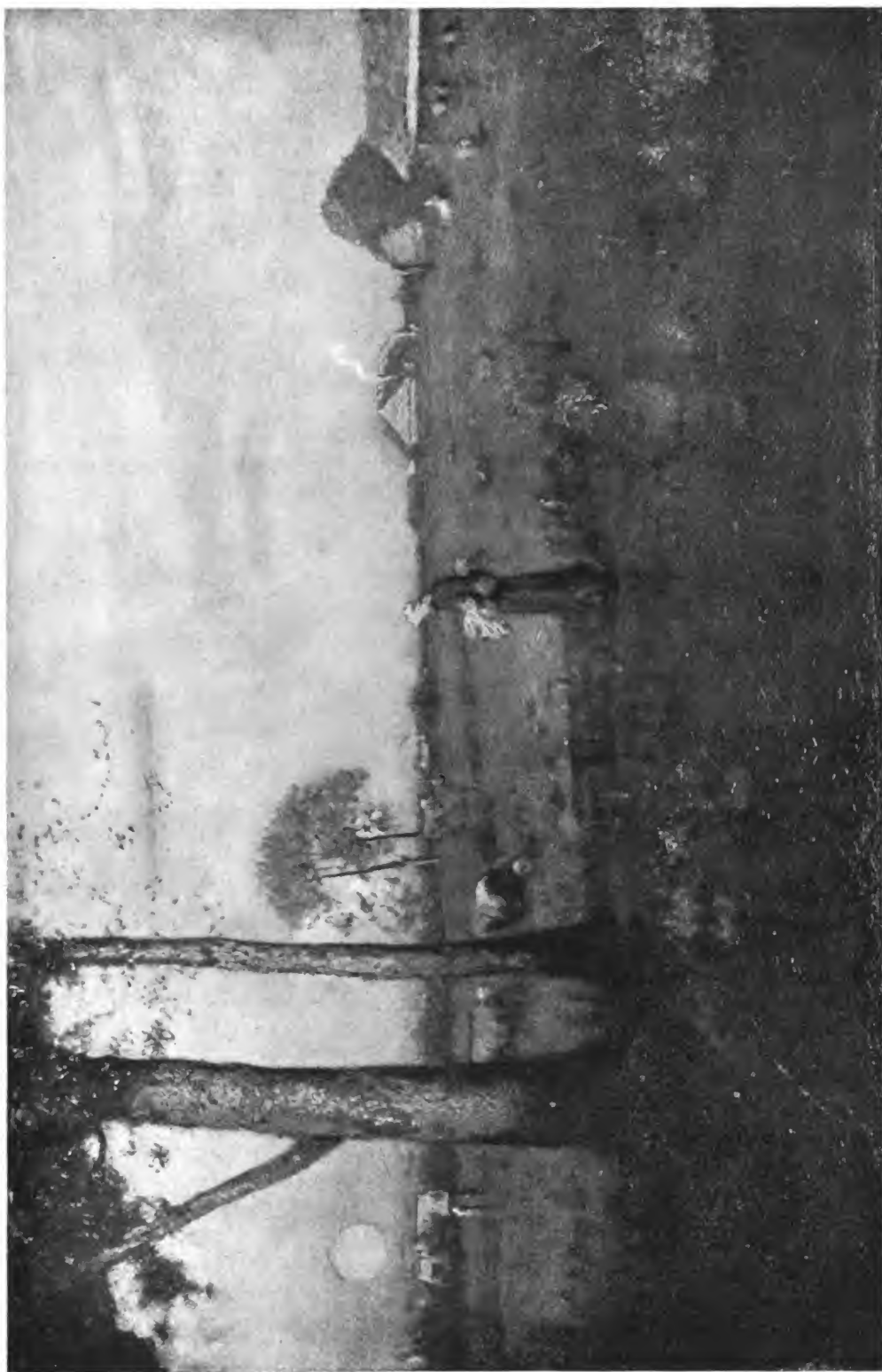
LANDSCAPE

BY A. H. WYANT



LANDSCAPE

BY HOMER D. MARTIN



"SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON"
BY GEORGE INNESS

The Tonal School



LANDSCAPE

BY HENRY W. RANGER

matter of light. Both these theories, however, serve of themselves only one purpose, that of transcribing facts. If we exchange brown shadows for purple shadows with a gain of truth we are only beginning to see. We have not by that alone arrived at poetry.

George Inness, who displayed in his later manner some of the qualities that became the boast of the succeeding school, and who had an admirably clear way of putting theories of art, said: "The purpose of the painter is simply to reproduce in other minds the impression which a scene has made upon him." Is this to reproduce form only? Colour and form only? Even values and tone? Clearly, there is something more in the transcript. "A work of art does not appeal to the intellect," continues Inness. "It does not appeal to the moral sense. Its aim is not to instruct, not to edify, but to awaken an emotion. . . . Its real greatness consists in the quality and force of this emotion." And, as seldom happens between theory and performance, the work of Inness himself shows this distribution of emphasis. The brilliant colour of our autumn woods stands on his canvas warmly brushed in and still kept well in tone—a record full of the glory and the quiet of the season, but without a leaf to be seen anywhere. For he understood the truth in the old complaint about not seeing the woods for the trees.

It is obvious. In the work of his predecessors too often one cannot see the tree for the leaves.

Here, then, pronounced by Inness and carried forward by Alexander H. Wyant and Homer D. Martin, is the motive that the Tonal School has made its own. The arrangement of colours must be kept in harmony because it must reproduce not merely the facts of the landscape, either separately or in mass, but, rather, the effect of the scene upon the painter's feelings, the emotion it evokes. Not alone the grass and the trees, with whatever delicate recognition of gradation of colour, but the mood, of which they are the embodiment and cause, is to be transferred to the canvas.

R. A. Blakelock, to be reckoned with Homer D. Martin and the gentler Wyant as a pioneer in the Tonal method, laid this characteristic requirement upon his technique. Though his canvases are usually small, his handling is broad to a degree that makes the preference for the sights of the "inward eye" rather than the vision of the photographic lens a rule of thumb. George Fuller, to cite another instance, showed in the work of his best period the conceptions of an original mind rather than direct observation of Nature. His painting, by the way, is particularly interesting in a school so deeply engaged upon landscape, because unlike most of the men he inclines to intro-



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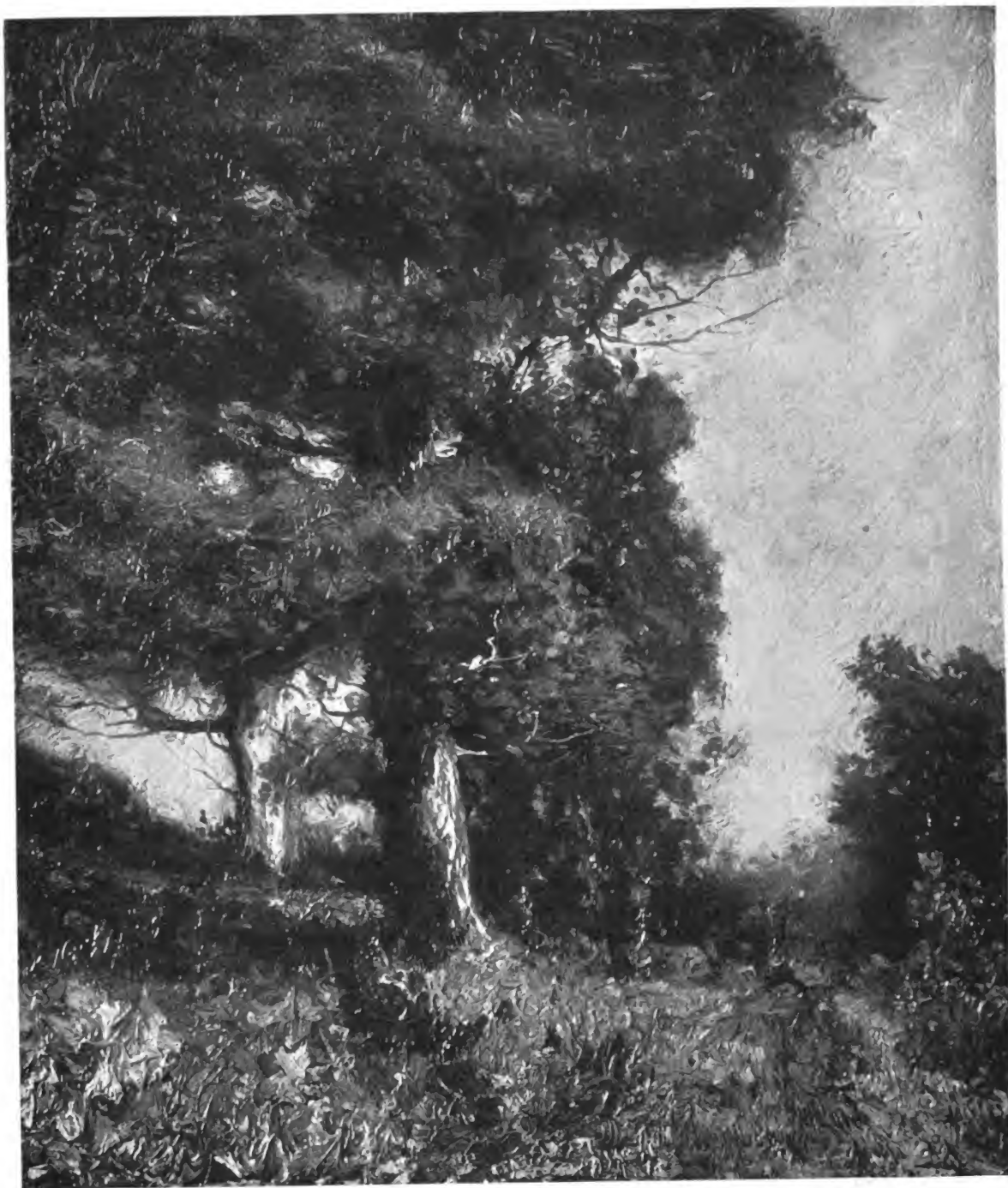
MORNING

BY LEONARD OCHTMAN



LANDSCAPE

BY ROBERT C. MINOR



LANDSCAPE
BY FRANK DE HAVEN

The Tonal School



HARBOUR OF NEW LONDON

BY REYNOLDS BEAL

duce figure work in his studies, perpetuating in the midst of this transplanted Barbizon enthusiasm the spirit of Millet.

For there was an echo of Barbizon at Lyme. Düsseldorf, which had displaced the older English influence, had in turn given way to more vital influences from France. It was the transposition of the ideals of the Barbizon painters to American soil by American artists that, with an admixture of Dutch tendencies and habits and of French technical discoveries, produced, through the action of a different national temperament and with the material of a region that was in comparison to northern France and Holland half tropical in climate, the Tonal School of America.

Ranger's youthful spirit was fired by the sight of some Barbizon paintings which had been brought to New York, and throughout it has been the Barbizon men, with the old Dutchmen, who have influenced his conception. As a student he reached Paris after the day of the Fontainebleau painters. Monet's method interested him as a science, not an art. And after successive returns for years to the galleries of Europe, which he made his atelier—for he never entered an art school—he returned to his native land and attracted attention from the first with his warm-toned woods in wine-red and gold. He has not won full recognition quickly, however,

largely because the *salon* idea, the miscellaneous grouping of unrelated work in an exhibition, is a thing he rejects. His forceful, beautifully composed paintings, with their rich colour harmonies and excellent structure of trees, have been seen in exhibitions only when alone by themselves or when grouped with the work of men whose theories harmonize with his own.

Among his contemporaries several should be mentioned as standing in relation to the Tonal School. Francis Murphy solves wonderfully the problem of giving us a highly impressive and truthful picture nearly without form or colour. Leonard Ochtman studies the effects of light of the early day or evening with poetic feeling. Dwight W. Tryon, and Horatio Walker with his motives from animal life, are decidedly individual. George W. Bogert, the master of sunset effects along the coast, and William Sartain, who inclined to the methods of the Tonal School in his later years, are among its best representatives. Frank de Haven, though nearer Salvator Rosa in some of his paintings of sea and rock, stands, with his deep, rich colour and fantastic effects, in close relation. Dearth's meadows and valleys show the same touch, and Robert C. Minor has in his best years given us some of the strongest of the tonal pictures.

But it is, of course, the younger men who show



WINTER

BY LOUIS PAUL DESSAR



LANDSCAPE

BY LOUIS PAUL DESSAR

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BLACK HEAD 'MONHEGAN

BY PAUL DOUGHERTY

Ranger's influence most. Though he has never accepted pupils and has always insisted on the duty of originality, no other artist of this time has had more influence on the younger generation. It should be noted, however, that the renown of the new Fontainebleau in Connecticut has been confused by the access of many imitators and art classes. Ranger, who made the reputation of the place, no longer spends his entire summer there, and what may be called the School of Lyme is to-day no longer altogether identical with the Tonal School.

Louis Paul Dessar has been for years closely in touch with Ranger, his master and friend, and with him first brought Lyme into remark. He has, however, preserved his own individuality. He is fond of the atmospheric effects of sunset and moonrise, and often finds an aid to his composition in his interest in animal life.

Gifford Beal excels in warmly-coloured effects of meadows and marshes. His younger brother, Reynolds Beal, formerly a marine engineer, prefers the opportunities in the play of light afforded by hulls and sails on the water.

A versatile young artist who has never settled in Lyme, though one of the strongest men of the Tonal School, is F. Ballard Williams. He is the only follower of Fuller, the early figure painter mentioned

above as one of the originators of the school. Last summer he visited Europe and has brought home some interesting landscapes with English motives.

Paul Dougherty may be ranked as the foremost marine painter of the younger generation. He began with a dark colour scheme, showing plainly the stamp of the school, but now, with clearer colours, he is exhibiting a more individual and direct manner. His expression is full of vitality and unspoiled vigour.

Albert L. Groll is the musical dreamer in colours. To his former colour symphonies of the Eastern woods and seas he has lately added the great chords of the Western wilderness, in the studies that he has just brought from the Southwest.

Another newcomer to the Tonal School is M. Evergood Blashki, an English Australian, lately settled in New York. His technique is bold and masterly. Paul King paints landscapes of decided Tonal qualities, but he belongs on the whole to a group whose methods lean partly in other directions. Many other Tonal painters would be worth mentioning. I have tried to speak of the few who embody new notes in painting in their personal manner of expression, and are still united by one aim, the Tonal qualities of their genuine American art.



ARIZONA SANDSTORM

BY A. L. GROLL



HEADLAND

BY FREDERICK BALLARD WILLIAMS



LANDSCAPE

BY M. EVERGOOD BLASHKI



EARLY MOONRISE

BY PAUL KING